

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0107

POLAD PLS PASS THAYER AT COM CONFERENCE

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PING, CH

SUBJECT: PRC MOURNING FOR CHOU EN-LAI

SUMMARY: PEKING WAS TOTALLY PROCCUPIED LAST WEEK WITH MOURNING
PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH. IN THIS MESSAGE, WE OFFER SOME OF
OUR IMPRESSIONS OF THIS MOURNING PERIOD. END SUMMARY.

1. OVER 55,000 PEOPLE IN PEKING ATTENDED OFFICIAL CEREMONIES AS
PART OF CHOU-EN-LAI'S FUNERAL AND AT LEAST TWO MILLION MORE
EXPRESSED THEIR SORROW AND RESPECT BY FILING PAST THE MARTYRS'S
MONUMENT IN TIEN AN MEN SQUARE OR GATHERING SILENTLY ALONG THE
ROAD TO THE CEMETERY. WREATHS PPRESENTED BY VIRUTALLY EVERY
ORGANIZATION IN PEKING ARE PILED HIGH AROUND THE BASE OF THE
MONUMENT AND THE HEDGES AROUND IT ARE WHITE WITH PAPER FLOWERS
OFFERED BY INDIVIDUALS. THE OFFICIAL MEDIA HAVE BEEN DOMINATED
BY REPORTS ON THE OFFICIAL CEREMONIES AND THE FLOOD OF CONDOLENCE
MESSAGES FROM ABROAD--PEOPLE'S DAILY ON JANUARY 16 DEVOTED
FIVE AND ONE-HALF OF ITS SIX PAGES TO CHOU EN-LAI.

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2. THE OFFICIAL CEREMONIES, ENDING JANUARY 15, WERE OF A SCALE AND SOLEMNITY BEFITTING THE PASSING OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FIGURE WHO HAD BEEN PREMIER FOR 26 YEARS AND A TOP PARTY LEADER FOR MUCH LONGER. THE OFFICIAL MOURNING FOR MAO, WHEN THAT TIME COMES, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE ON A GRANDER SCALE, BUT CAN HARDLY BE MORE EXPRESSIVE OF GENUINE RESPECT AND SORROW. IN A COUNTRY WHERE EVERYTHING IS TALKED ABOUT IN RELATIONSHIP TO MAO AND WHERE PROPAGANDA LESSONS MUST BE DRAWN FROM EVEN THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT EVENTS, THE DEGREE TO WHICH THESE THEMES HAVE BEEN FOREGONE TO CONCENTRATE ON REMEMBERING CHOU IS A STRIKING TRIBUTE TO HIS UNIQUE ROLE IN CHINA.

3. IT IS HOWEVER THE PEOPLE'S MOURNING THIS PAST WEEK THAT HAS BEEN MOST IMPRESSIVE. WE KNEW CHOU HAD A SPECIAL PLACE IN PEKING'S AFFECTIONS BUT HOW MUCH THIS WAS SO BECAME CLEARER IN WATCHING A CITY GO THROUGH EMOTIONAL PHASES SUCH AS ONE ASSOCIATES WITH FAMILY MOURNING. AND IN A SENSE THE PEOPLE OF PEKING HELD THEIR OWN FUNERAL FOR CHOU, CENTERED ON THE MARTYRS'S MONUMENT. THE MONUMENT HAD NOT BEEN USED FOR MOURNING EARLIER DEATHS OF PARTY AND STATE LEADERS AND WAS IT SEEMS NOT INITIALLY DESIGNATED AS A SITE FOR THIS OCCASION. BUT IT CARRIES A LENGTHY INSCRIPTION BY CHOU (AS WELL AS A SHORT ONE BY MAO) AND SOON AFTER CHOU'S DEATH BECAME KNOWN MANY PEOPLE, APPARENTLY ON THEIR OWN, GRAVITATED TO IT TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS. THEN VARIOUS GROUPS INCLUDING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS REPORTEDLY ASKED FOR, AND AFTER SOME DELAY OBTAINED, PERMISSION TO PLACE WREATHS AT ITS BASE--AN APPARENTLY SPONTANEOUS START TO WHAT HAS SINCE BECOME A MASSIVE, HIGHLY ORGANIZED AND SOMEWHAT MECHANICAL PROCEEDING.

4. BESIDES THE LOSS PEOPLE FELT TO THEMSELVES, THERE WAS AN ALMOST OVERWHELMING SENSE OF LOSS TO CHINA WITH CHOU'S PASSING. IN HIS EULOGY, TENG HSIAO-PING DWELT AT LENGTH ON CHOU'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY, NOTING IN PARTICULAR THAT CHOU HAD RUN THE "ARDUOUS DAY-TO-DAY TASKS OF THE PARTY AND STATE." WITHOUT TENG'S TELLING THEM, EVERYONE, OF COURSE, KNEW THE CRITICAL ROLE CHOU PLAYED IN KEEPING THE COUNTRY MOVING, ESPECIALLY IN PERIODS OF VIOLENT IDEOLOGICAL UPHEAVAL. EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE HAD HAD A YEAR AND A HALF TO PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR CHOU'S DEATH THE ACTUAL OCCURRENCE STILL WAS A JOLT.

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TEHG SEEMED TO BE WELL IN PLACE BUT THERE IS NO ASSURANCE THAT HE CAN PERFORM CHOU'S STABILIZING FUNCTION AS THE LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION UNFOLDS.

5. ANOTHER NOTEWORTHY THEME HAS BEEN THE IMAGE OF UNITY, CLOSE PERSONAL TIES AND SHARED GRIEF AMONG THE LEADERSHIP PROJECTED FOR THE PEOPLE OF CHINA BY THE WEEK'S ACTIVITIES--IN PARTICULAR BY THE FILM SHOWING CHANG CHUN-CHIAO EMBRACING

MADAME CHOU AND THE FILM AND THE JANUARY 16 PEOPLE'S DAILY FRONT-PAGE PICTURE OF AN OBVIOUSLY DISTRAUGHT WANG HUNG-WEN SHAKING HER HAND. THIS IMAGE IS UNDOUBTEDLY REASSURING IN FACE OF THE UNCERTAINTIES FOLLOWING CHOU'S DEPARTURE AND IT MAY ALSO BE EFFECTIVE IN UNDERLINING THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY AT ALL LEVELS OF THE SOCIETY.

6. THE WEEK UNDERLINES CHINA'S AMBIVALENT STANCE TOWARD FOREIGNERS. FOREIGN DIGNITARIES WERE NOT ALLOWED TO COME FROM ABROAD TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS, BUT THE PROMINENT ATTENTION GIVEN THE HUGE NUMBER OF CONDOLENCES, THE FILMCLIPS OF PEKING DIPLOMATS PAYING THEIR RESPECTS, AND TENG'S REFERENCE TO THE RESPECT ABROAD FOR CHOU SERVED TO REMIND THE POPULACE OF CHINA'S NOW PROMINENT ROLE IN THE WORLD AND THAT THE PRC PRODUCED ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST WIDELY ADMIRER STATESMEN.
THOMAS

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